

CALIFORNIA COASTAL COMMISSION

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CALIFORNIA COASTAL CLEANUP DAY
Presented by the California Coastal Commission
Saturday, September 20th, 2003

The California Coastal Commission is proud to announce that the 19th Annual California Coastal Cleanup Day will take place on Saturday, September 20th, from 9 a.m. to noon at over 600 locations throughout the state. Volunteers will clean the debris from 1,100 miles of the California coast as well as the shorelines of bays, creeks, rivers, and lakes that aid in the transfer of trash and debris to the Pacific Ocean.

California Coastal Cleanup Day serves as California's contribution to the International Coastal Cleanup, organized by The Ocean Conservancy (www.oceanconservancy.org). All 50 states and over 100 countries take part in the International Cleanup, making this effort the largest marine-related volunteer event in the world. In addition to collecting trash from the Earth's waterways, volunteers also collect data during the Cleanup, providing important clues as to the nature and source of the trash. Data collections from past cleanups have shown that plastic debris represents by far the largest proportion of debris in our marine environment – over 60 percent most years. In an effort to help stem the tide of plastic debris that flows to our oceans, the Coastal Commission this year committed itself to removing traditional plastics from the Coastal Cleanup event.

The trash and recycle bags the California Coastal Commission has provided for use during the upcoming California Coastal Cleanup Day are made with corn starch and are 100% biodegradable and compostable. They have been certified under the ASTM D-6400-99 standard that has been developed by researchers, product manufacturers, composters, and resin producers in order to distinguish entirely biodegradable plastic resins from those that simply break apart into ever smaller fragments.

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“For many years now, we have known that, of all the forms of debris out there, plastics present the greatest threat to our marine environment,” says Eben Schwartz, Statewide Outreach Coordinator for the California Coastal Commission. “Non-biodegradable plastic persists in the marine environment for decades – we don’t even know how long it takes to entirely biodegrade. When we discovered an effective, safe alternative for our volunteers to use, we embraced the opportunity.”

Recent studies by the Algalita Marine Research Foundation and Southern California Coastal Water Research Program have shown the plastic debris situation to be even more dire than the picture presented by annual Coastal Cleanup Day data. In one recent study, a sampling study that took place over a 6,000-square mile area in the Central Pacific Gyre, the concentration of plastic particles in the open ocean was found to be six times higher than the concentration of plankton – in other words, there were six pounds of plastic in the ocean for every one pound of plankton. In another study, conducted more recently off the coast of southern California, the ratio was found to be closer to three to one, still an extraordinarily high concentration of plastic material.

Plastic has become part of the marine food chain – it is mistaken for food by marine animals. Research suggests that plastic in the ocean serves as a transport vehicle for PCBs and other toxins, which could be one potential source of PCB contamination found in animals throughout the marine food chain. For example, the Japanese Fisheries Agency recently discovered high levels of PCB concentrations in whale blubber. (Associated Press, 8/9/02.)

Volunteers are encouraged to contact the California Coastal Commission in order to sign up for Coastal Cleanup Day 2003. Please contact the Commission at (800) COAST-4U or visit our Web site at www.coastforyou.org.

For more information about biodegradable plastics, please visit www.bpiworld.org

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